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Creators: Tubbs, Ellen L.

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An Honest Architecture

Frank Lloyd Wright's Contribution to an Architecture for America

By ELLEN L. TUBBS, ARCH. E. III

In proving to the world that a good architecture can grow out of the heart and mind of man without the enslaving dictates of tradition, Frank Lloyd Wright has given the world a democratic architecture. With Nature as his only restriction he has given his imagination a chance to develop an honest style of architecture, worthy of being called, "American." Wright expresses an architecture which, because of its use of material, is subordinate to Nature. In considering the Nature and color of materials he has blended the architecture with the surroundings.

Each civilization has evolved its own art, using the best tools of its age. Every people has had its own Architecture, developed form, and characteristics peculiar to its own age; yet America, a land of freedom, has chosen to copy ancient European forms of Architecture. This is as ridiculous as it would be to return to the use of the chattel slave of the Greek civilization. Wright believes that a free people should express their love of freedom in their architecture as well as in their other forms of Art. Thus he uses common sense, Nature, and his own individuality as his guides in designing.

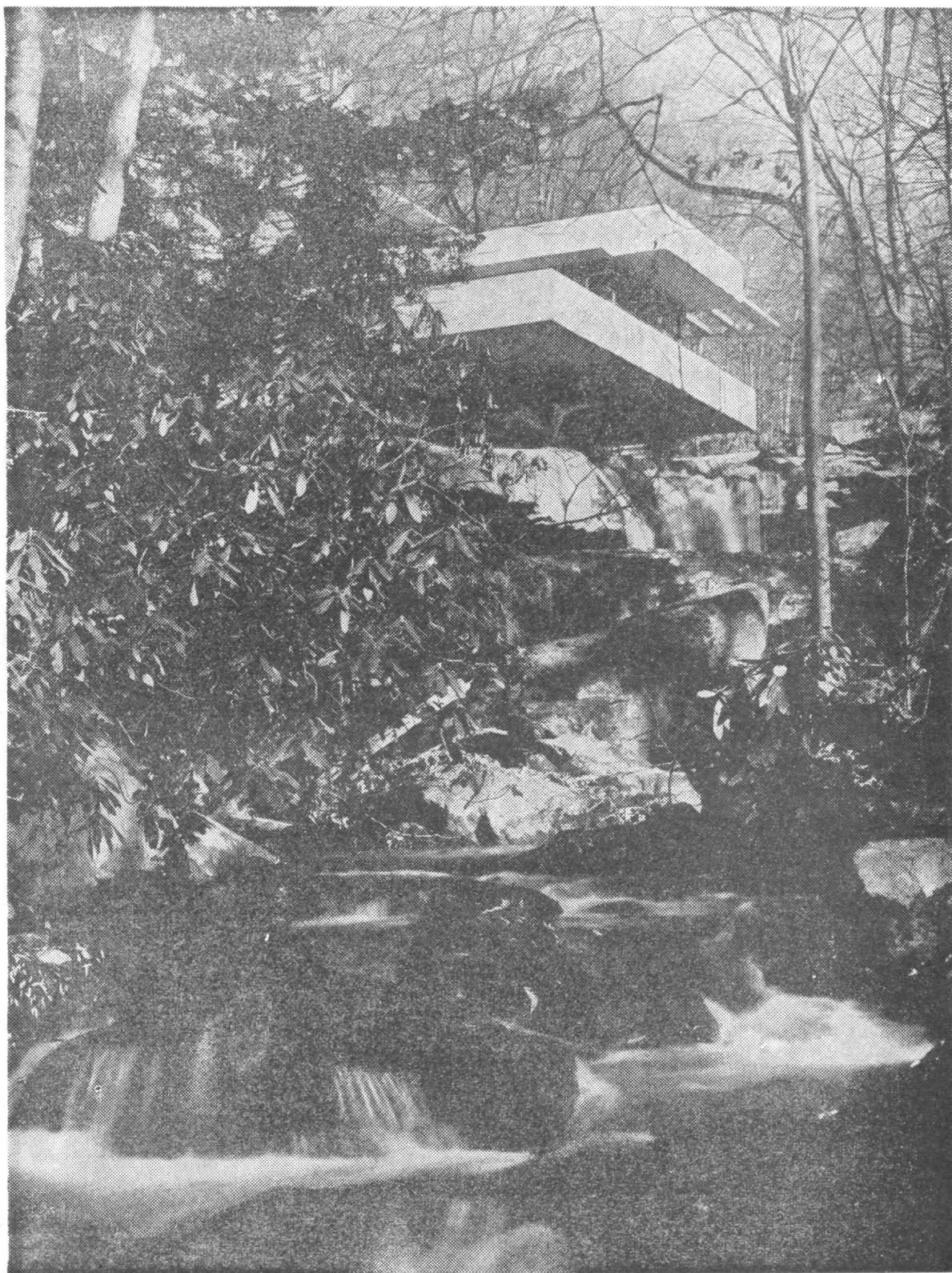
Some of Wright's most striking forms of modern architecture are to be found in his designs for homes. Here he has let Nature rule supreme. It is his belief that nothing is more beautiful than a natural setting, since it is from nature that we get our inspiration for beauty. Probably the most noted of his houses is his "Falling Water" house, built in 1936 at Bear Run, Pennsylvania. Here he used cantilevered slabs anchored to a masonry core and to the natural rock in order to carry the house out over the waterfall. The main floor of the house is one large room with various alcoves opening onto it and a staircase which leads to the stream below. On the upper floors there are various suites, each with its own terrace. Concrete, natural rock, and glass set in metal frames are employed to make this one of the most famous examples of contemporary architecture in the world.

Frank Lloyd Wright's true genius as an engineer is apparent in his design of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. The problem here was unlike that the architect had to deal with, that of designing a structure which would withstand earthquakes and also the fires which followed. Since no building had ever been built that could with-

stand these earthquakes, structures which could be built in a hurry were considered the best. But the Japanese committee wanted a permanent building for the Imperial Hotel. In solving this problem Wright used a cantilevered construction (which he likened to the balancing of a tray on the waiters fingers) to float the structure on the cushion of mud which lay beneath the firm top crust of the island. In the court of the Hotel he used large pools not for ornament as would be assumed by their beauty but to assure an adequate supply of water in case of fire. In 1923 the real test of Wright's construction came. A great earthquake struck the island, but the Hotel survived, not only because of its construction but also because of its adequate supply of water. It was then that Japan proclaimed Wright as "the greatest modern architect."

This opened for him the field of industrial building in the United States which up to this time had refused to accept his new style. Among those industrial buildings which followed was the famous Johnson Wax building in Racine, Wisconsin. Here the preliminary construction was begun in the fall of 1936, but because of its unique construction a building permit was not issued until the following spring. This system used hollow monolithic shafts placed twenty feet on center. The walls and balcony parapets are made of hard red brick with an even finish similar to that of the waxed linoleum floors. The structure is light and plastic as well as fireproof and soundproof. The building and furnishings were not completed until the spring of 1939.

Taliesin, near Spring Green, Wisconsin, is Mr. Wright's favorite home. Besides Mr. Wright and his family, Taliesin houses the twenty-five or more young men who work with him. Taliesin was built of the natural limestone quarried in the vicinity. Red cypress is used for finishing both in the interior and exterior giving an unusual color effect to the design. Because it is located four miles from the nearest village and forty miles from any large city it is necessary that Taliesin have its own heat, power, sewer, and water systems—it is for this same reason that most of its entertainment come from within the establishment also. Taliesin displays some of the interesting pieces of sculpture and pottery which Frank Lloyd Wright secured from the Japanese while he was supervising the construction of the Imperial

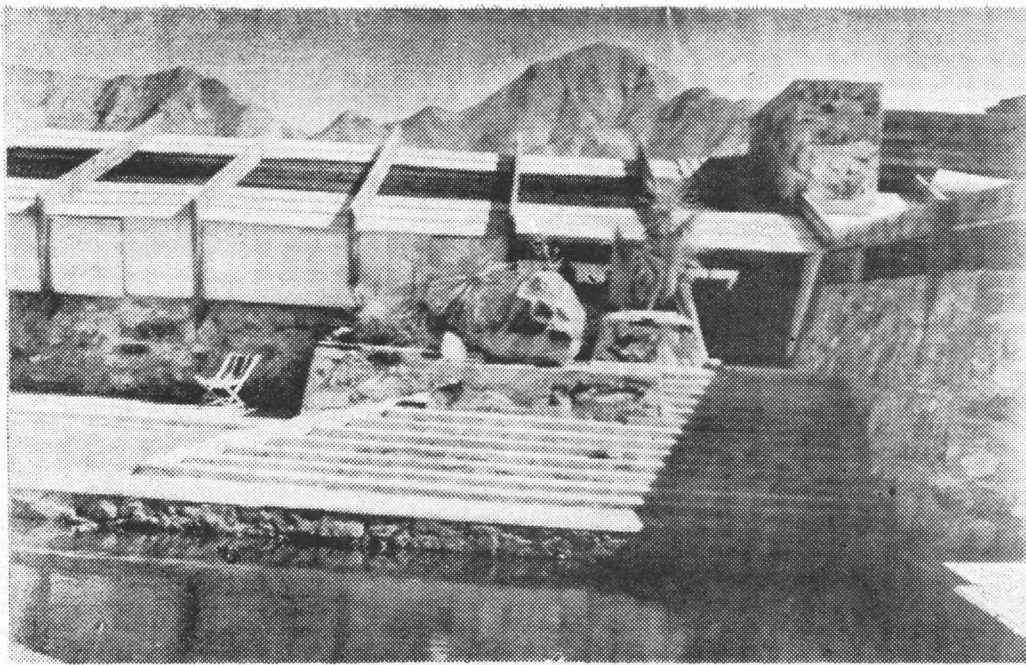


—Courtesy The Columbus Citizen.

Frank Lloyd Wright's famous "Falling Water House," Bear Run, Pennsylvania.

Hotel. Among these are an eighteenth century ming tea jar and a cast iron figure to be seen in the entrance loggia. Others have been placed throughout the house proper and the adjoining gardens. Much of the beauty of Taliesin is evident in the interesting shapes and forms used in creat-

ing the furniture designs. Mr. Wright, who believes that the important thing in designing furniture is the consideration of physical comfort as well as beauty, designs his furniture (as he does his buildings) without the use of traditional forms. Changes and additions are continually



Wright's Winter home in the magnificent desert setting of Maricopa Mesa, near Phoenix, Arizona. The walls of concrete and colorful desert rock support red wood trusses and canvas roof flaps which admit softly diffused light.

—Courtesy The Columbus Citizen.

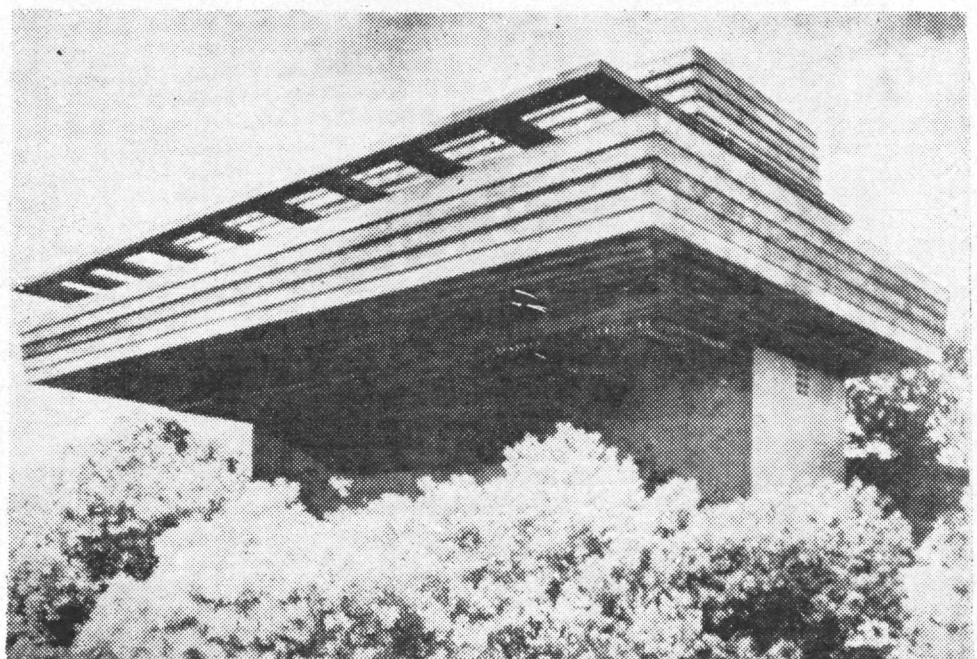
being made at Taliesin by the Fellowship. The buildings used by the fellowship are located one quarter of a mile from the main house. Included in this group are the drafting room with a large fireplace at one end, a model making and exhibition room at the other, and small apprentice rooms on the sides; cottages for workmen; kitchen and dining rooms for apprentices; several shops for crafts and machinery; and the Fellowship playhouse, one of the most interesting buildings on the estate.

Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture expresses a new freedom for the individual, a freedom from the use of traditional forms and details which has made architecture in America a mediocre thing in the past. Since architecture is allied to art, and an art is the expression of individuals, it seems logical that architecture should be an expression

of the civilization of the era in which it is created. It is useless to think of adapting the stone style of the Greeks and Romans to modern materials such as concrete and glass products, yet Wright has had to battle with tradition continually. With modern construction methods there is no longer the need for peaked roofs, pillars of the Greek Temples, and flying buttresses. The advantages of our building materials demand a new architecture. This is the architecture that Frank Lloyd Wright has begun. Wright has opened the way to a better architecture in America.

"The day of the individual is not over—instead, it is just about to begin. The machine does not write the doom of Liberty, but is waiting at man's hand as a peerless tool, for him to use to put foundations beneath a genuine Democracy."*

*Wright, *Modern Architecture*, p. 21.



This is a "House with a View" in Brentwood Heights, California, built by means of bold cantilevering.

—Courtesy The Columbus Citizen.